

REMARKS

Claims 1-15 are pending in the application and have been rejected. Applicants provide the following comments to the rejections set forth in the Office Action of January 2, 2004.

Claim Rejection-35 U.S.C. § 102

Claims 1-15 are rejected as anticipated under 102(e) in view of Hirai (US20010019659).

Applicants have carefully considered the rejection and request that it be withdrawn because the Hirai application does not qualify as prior art. Hirai was filed on December 28, 2000. The present application was filed on October 20, 2000.

Applicants note that Hirai claims priority from a Japanese application filed on December 29, 1999. However, the filing date of the Japanese application is not the 102(e) date of the Hirai application. The 102(e) date of the Hirai application is December 28, 2000.

Applicants also note that the present application has a priority date of October 21, 1999.

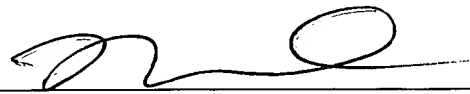
CONCLUSION

Applicants respectfully request that a timely Notice of Allowance be issued in this case. If any additional fees are due in connection with the filing of this response, please charge the fees to Deposit Account No. 02-4300. Any overpayment can be credited to Deposit Account No. 02-4300.

Respectfully submitted,

Date: January 20, 2004

Signature:



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